

REORGANISATION OF NORTH EAST INDIA SINCE 1947



B DATTA RAY
S P AGRAWAL

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About the Editors

Dr. B. Datta Ray, (b.1925) a pioneer in promoting and popularising research in social sciences in the tribal areas of the North-Eastern India, is the founder-Secretary of the North-East India Council for Social Science Research. A veteran freedom fighter and a Tamrapatra holder, Dr. Datta Ray is a former Head of the Political Science Department of St. Edmund's College, Shillong, and has authored and edited a number of publications.

S. P. Agrawal (b.1929) was Director, National Social Science Documentation Centre, ICSSR, and Member-Secretary, Indian Association of Social Science Institution. He was also the Vice-Chairman of the Asia and Pacific Information Network in Social Sciences (APINESS). In 1988, he was awarded the degree of Philosophy in Education (Honoris Causa) by International University Foundation. Presently, he is a Member, Round Table on Research in Reading, IFLA and Member, International Committee for Social Science Information and Documentation. He is also Member of Board of Studies of National Archives of India and Hindi Advisory Committee, Ministry of Coal, Government of India. Born and brought up in the cradle of freedom movement which he joined at the tender age of twelve, he gained an insight into political problems and developed a sense of responsibility which bore fruit as an information scientist committed to Gandhiji's philosophy and action-plan in the field and its social concept. He has written extensively on various aspects of education, Indian polity and library and information Science.

**REORGANIZATION
OF
NORTH-EAST INDIA SINCE 1947**

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INTRODUCTION

The British took over Assam in 1826 to make the eastern frontier of the British possessions secure, although the architect of the British possession of the extended north-east frontier, David Scott, initially was against the permanent occupation of Assam. But the scene completely changed with the discovery that the tea plant was a native of Assam. The realisation that the plant was genuine tea and capable of manufacture into a marketable item and later discovery of open seams of coal and presence of petroleum and other minerals made Assam attractive to British capital investment in progressive measure. The initial hesitancy vanished and Assam was finally annexed in 1838. Assam underwent rapid transformation after this and British investment increased. With the final annexation of Assam, the Government of India assumed as successor government, the paramountcy over the north-east Hills. Like the Ahoms, the Supreme Government pursued a policy of non-interference tempered by conciliation and display of force. During the period of 1826 and 1874, the British authority extended over the hills bordering Assam and Barak valley.

During this period, relations with the hills had been handled on an adhoc basis by the officials in the neighbouring areas. The degree of authority exercised by the British on becoming the paramount power had varied in different areas and in reference to different races of hillmen. The object of British policy towards the hills had been conciliation and penetration giving the north-east India a new territorial and administrative unity.

The British inherited and continued the Inne Line policy from the Ahoms. This was assimilated and brought into line with their own political philosophy of broad non-intervention pursued elsewhere in India at that time. The Inner Line Regulation of 1873, the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874, the Government of India Act, 1919, the Government of India Act, 1935 broadly unfold the British tribal policy and administration of north-east India.

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the administration of hill areas of the province of Assam were classified into Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, Excluded Areas remaining with Governor of Assam exercising power in his discretion without ministerial advice. The initiative in all legislative and executive acts in the Partially Excluded Areas lay with the Provincial Ministers, but the Governor of Assam had a special responsibility acting in his individual judgement in this field.

With the coming of the Constitution of India in 1950, the tribal areas of north-east India were placed in two parts, A and B in the Table appended to the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. In the part A, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, the Garo Hills District, the Naga Hills District, the North-Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills District were placed. The North-East frontier Tracts including Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Abor Hill and Mishmi Hills and the Naga Hills Tribal Areas were categorised in Part B. Part A areas formed the Autonomous Districts and were administered by the Government of Assam with the Autonomous District Councils established in 1952 except in Naga Hills District. The Governor of Assam continued to administer at his discretion Part B areas as Agent to the President of India. The Naga Hills were restive and refused the scheme under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. In 1954, after minor territorial adjustments, the North-East Frontier Tracts with Abor Hills and Mishmi Hills Districts were transformed into North-East Frontier Agency, under Ministry of External Affairs. Subsequently in 1965, the Ministry of Home Affairs took charge of it. The Lushai Hills District became Mizo District in 1954.

The Tuensang Division of North-East Frontier Agency and the Naga Hills District became a new administrative unit under the Ministry of External Affairs in 1957. The Government of Assam lost its authority over the Naga Hills District and the rolling back process began. In December, 1963, the State of Nagaland was born. Nagaland became the trend-setter. The demands for separate political identities in the hills gathered momentum. A short lived experiment was made to stem the tide in the form of Autonomous State of Meghalaya in 1970. Meghalaya was made a full state in 1972. The North-Eastern Frontier Agency was transformed into Arunachal Pradesh and upgraded along with Mizoram into Union Territory. The Governor of Assam lost

his administrative control over Arunachal Pradesh. The dream of greater Assam ended thus in 1972. The princely States of Manipur and Tripura which acceded to Union of India in 1949 under the Instrument of Accession were initially under respective Chief Commissioners and in 1972 they became full fledged states.

The Government of India Act, 1935 and the Constitution of India kindled the aspirations of middle class leadership of the Brahmaputra valley for an expanded Assam. The inner contradiction of the emerging society, the emergence of new middle-classes in the Hills, ethnic and linguistic assertions, the lack of sensitivity for equitable economic development in the leadership led to the break up of Assam as it stood on the coming of Constitution of India which released new social forces all over the north-east. Insurgency for ethnic identity broke the fragile administrative unity believing that homelands would give better chance in the changing geopolitical scenario. History is a hard taskmaster. Like nature, it asserts itself. Reorganisation is a continuous process. So, further reorganisation of north-east, within the broad frame of the Union of India cannot be ruled out.

B. DUTTA ROY

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**B. DATTA RAY
S. P. AGRAWAL**

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No region in India has undergone such fragmentation as North-East has in the four decades after independence. What remains of the old province of Assam after the last reorganisation in 1972 are virtually the districts of the Brahmaputra and barak valleys where British rule in the north-east began after the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26). The hill regions that were brought under the administrative control of Assam as the eastern frontier of the empire extended, now formed as separate states. While the process of expansion and integration was spread over a century, the disintegration and territorial reorganisation has occurred within a relatively short time.

The volume is planned to go into the historical background of the problem with special reference to the fragile nature of the administrative unity given to the erstwhile province of Assam by the British; the partition at Independence and the question of ethnic identity including the role of language and the demand for reorganisation. It further examines the consequences of partition and reorganisation particularly on the social and economic developmental process in the region and the political fall-out.

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OTHER BOOKS OF INTEREST

- Descriptive Account of Assam (A): With a Sketch of the Local Geography**
– *William Robinson* Rs. 100
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